

Transcript of Marc Wise

Marc Wise

We're at the Mountain View Community Learning Center. My name is Marc Wise, M-A-R-C, W-I-S-E. My job is early childhood mentor coach.

Interviewer

Tell us what that is. What do you do?

Marc Wise

I'm a go-between, between our administration and the teachers. So basically I'm a resource for the teachers to not only help them comply with what the administration wants, but I also take things back from the teachers to the administration as well as helping each individual teacher do their job a little better, hopefully. Hopefully that's something that I can do. I'm pretty new to doing this because I've been in the classroom the last few years here, so. I'm trying to exactly figure out what exactly the goals of my job are as well as the role itself.

Interviewer

So is it more like you're trying to follow a certain curriculum?

Marc Wise

It's along with that. We have a concept called Model Fidelity which is pretty new to the early childhood program. And in our 18 school sites it's hard to have a uniform protocol and a uniform system despite having an instituted curriculum and one that addresses the state of Utah's core standards. So trying to get all the teachers in 18 sites, some of which have two classes a day, up to 40 kids, trying to make sure that all the paperwork and administrative stuff gets taken care of on their end so that they can just teach and worry about the children in the classroom.

Interviewer

So it's lot of administrative work?

Marc Wise

Yeah, I think, to start right now it seems far more administrative than anything. I think as the year goes on and the beginning of the year chaos kind of settles out, most of my work will then be in the classroom helping teachers and helping teachers with either specific students or lesson plans or any sort of idea that they may have or benefit from in their classroom.

Interviewer

So what's the mentoring part?

Marc Wise

I think the mentoring part is... being a place where teachers can go to talk about what's going on in their classroom, to have an open door where they can come and air any issue or problem they may be having whether or not it's with a parent or a school site or something else or their partner or something's just a little off. I think where I come in as a mentor is to help facilitate resolution of that problem.

Interviewer

So you have skills in psychology, and conflict resolution and those kinds of things?

Marc Wise

I would say, I mean, through teaching experience and over the past ten years of teaching a wide variety of students, I think those are things that kind of come with the territory. My background specifically is in American history as well as I have a master's in English. So not specifically psychology or conflict resolution but more dealing with people and understanding that it's going to be different everywhere.

Interviewer

Why are you here working in pre-K? You were telling me the story of your first pre-K teacher?

Marc Wise

Yeah, I think a lot of times it's just circumstance kind of where I've ended up. Initially I always thought I was going to be a university teacher and that changed luckily for me when I started subbing at a small progressive private school in California. And I had so much fun working with the children that year and seeing the educational system from a different perspective. That sort of bright-eyed -- not deer in headlights, but you know, you're new to everything when you're four and five and coming into a classroom. And it's a whole new world and it's new people that you've never been around. And to watch that journey over the course of a year was really, really beneficial for me. And so when we came here and I taught college at a vocational school here, I taught English and rhetoric and humanities and writing. And it wasn't really what I was happy doing. And so when I saw this job was available and it's like it's time to go back and teach the little guys again. So.

Interviewer

But you were telling me about your personal --

Marc Wise

Yeah, and my first teacher ever was a male preschool teacher in Denver. And he was so much fun and made going to school a really wonderful and

mind-expanding endeavor on a daily basis. And he was a teacher that my brother had had and my mother loved him and it was a really wonderful experience.

Interviewer

What do you remember about him that made a difference?

Marc Wise

Just his large personality. He took up a lot of space in the room which can be a good thing when you have 20 four year olds running around. You kind of need to be able to command some attention in that sense and he was always able to get our attention and do it in a really kind -- most of the time -- really humorous way. So he was all about making us laugh from the start. So.

Interviewer

Do you have stories of kids that you've seen have barriers and then you break through them, success stories?

Marc Wise

I mean thinking about that, just starting from a really small, you know, especially just because I've been in the classroom lately and this is the end of the first week of school. And you see that anxiety and the trepidation and for lack of a better term, just general fear in a lot of children's faces. And to watch that dissipate as even this week has gone on, as I've visited school sites is one thing that I love about this program, about how it doesn't take that long to realize that this is a safe place despite its newness. I think a lot of the stories that I have are -- it's more me learning from children and me learning from students as they open up and basically they tell me how to teach them after a while. I've had a couple of students that were extraordinary energetic, extraordinary intelligent, and yet trying to harness that intelligence and that energy into a four or five-year-old that can be in a classroom for three hours can sometimes be difficult to manage. And to have that happen on more than one occasion where it happens multiple times in a class during the course of a year, it's a pretty enlightening thing to witness when it finally clicks and the student says something to you whether it's like "Can you help me write this book about a dog that is friends with a fish because I didn't think a dog could be a friend with a fish, but I want to make a book about this." And to watch them try and navigate that and for me to be open to saying, "Okay, let's let you make the decisions about where this book goes, about what happens here." And I think in a lot of classrooms, especially as children get older, the scope of learning becomes more narrow and you're guided on a specific step by step path. And I think our program begins the education process in a school setting with a tremendous amount of open-ended activities that the kids can truly explore their surroundings rather than being edged off one way or another.

Interviewer

Lot of creativity, independence.

Marc Wise

Yeah, I think creativity and independence are like those are sort of the foundations. And while kids are learning how to be in a room with 20 other kids, at the same time, they have to have that individual experience that allows them to be creative and to explore. So.

Marc Wise

Those situations where they were looking for teachers over the summer, so it's rare that they have male applicants at all.

Interviewer

Talk about Matthew and how you became his mentor and what's going on in his life.

Marc Wise

Yeah, Matthew's teaching at Bennion Elementary School right now. It's the end of his first week as a preschool teacher. And I was over there this morning and things are going really well. He has a bunch of really fun kids and a really good assistant in his room, Tasha, who is a certified teacher too. So she's kind of helping him navigate the waters of being a teacher in a classroom for the first time. For all intents and purposes I was assigned Matthew as one of my teachers that I work for. So I have five school sites that I see and Matthew, just starting out in his first couple weeks working with us, I've -- in terms of my role, I'm trying to just let him figure things out and come to me with any questions. I've been an oracle if you will, for him, just with whatever question he has. Hopefully I have an answer for it. But he's managed remarkably well and is extraordinarily relaxed and extraordinarily comfortable in the room and with the kids. And I think that speaks to him being a father of two children, so.

Interviewer

I'm looking at a two-generational approach in education in regards to poverty and helping parents find the right skills to improve their life. As a preschool teacher do you connect to families?

Marc Wise

Yeah, we have to. That's the first people that we meet. Before we meet the children, we meet with the parents. And that is an absolutely vital connection to the education of four and five year old. The parents are the first teachers and if we as teachers don't try to reach out and connect with the parents, we can't help extend what we're trying to do here at school, at home. If we think about it, for each section of pre-K we've got, as a teacher you've got 12 hours a week with the children. And the rest of the time they're with parents, other caregivers and you really have to rely on the parents and caregivers during the rest of the portion of the day, that other 18 hours, 4 days a week to help communicate some of the same things that you're trying to do in the classroom. And the level of

involvement with parents is -- you know, it's voluntary. There are a lot of parents that love to stay with their children for the first little while and there are a lot of parents that just drop their children off and go. And there's a different approach across the board and different parents in each different school site approach their interaction with teachers and with school in a different way. I think if you're a parent and your school experience wasn't perhaps the best growing up, but you know your kids have to go to school, a lot of times I think kids get, you know, dropped off and it's like, okay, you have to do this because I had to do this and you'll learn things but hopefully you'll like it better than I do. And that's one approach. And then some parents are extraordinarily interactive and hands-on and want to extend the teacher's learning all the way to the home. So it's a pretty wide array of approaches in terms of how parents and kids connect with not only the classroom, but the resource of the teacher in the classroom.

Interviewer

So what do you see with the kids who have very active parents?

Marc Wise

Rapid improvement.

Marc Wise

When I see parents really focused and goal-oriented in terms of what they want from their child's education you see improvement on a really rapid scale whereas conversely, if parents aren't as active, that improvement, while it's still going to happen, it happens a little more gradually. There are some students that because of the kind of interaction they get at home, and combining that with school, halfway through pre-K, they could handle a kindergarten classroom, no problem. There's quite a number of that. Whereas other students, where perhaps there's a little less interaction, it may take the whole year or it may take two years. So I just see the ability for the children to soak up the information given that their minds are so malleable and so sponge-like at this age that the more attention is paid, the more results you get.

Interviewer

So what is the program here that Robin and Audrey talked about?

Marc Wise

Parents as Teachers. And it's a program where parents can come in and learn from some of the more experienced teachers in a classroom setting how to better interact with their children at home. How to organize activities that are specific to certain kinds of learning that they're going to be faced with in the classroom. And that's not just in pre-K, that's going to be in kindergarten and learning that structure and seeing that that structure doesn't happen in just one place, but it goes from school to home and back to school and everywhere else. And that basically, the world that surrounds them is a lab for their learning in an ideal sense.

Interviewer
That's volunteer?

Marc Wise
Yes.

Interviewer
What is high quality pre-K? Why is it even important?

Marc Wise
The importance of high quality pre-K in our country is the result of studies that have -- I'm trying to remember the name of the study that took place in Michigan in the '60s where they looked at outcomes for both poor and affluent children that had pre-K versus didn't have pre-K. And a number of studies since in the decades since have come out saying that by being in school, starting at the age of four or even at three, your potential earning wages go up, or the chance that you're going to end up in prison goes down. There's a number of reasons, starting with social emotion development and being around that many other people and learning to navigate that space, the space of others in the world, that shows that pre-K vastly improves your ability not only in that social emotional realm but your ability in school. The younger that kind of structured setting starts, the easier it is for a child's brain to take in the information and to understand what's going on around them a little later.

Interviewer
So developmentally the zero to five is pretty critical to inform the rest of their life?

Marc Wise
It's huge. Yeah, the ages of zero to five are -- education during those ages are vital to outcomes later in life. There's not too many people that you're going to find that can refute that bare bones of a statement. And you can see it even here in the state of Utah by the fact that pre-K is not a mandatory thing. Pre-K is a choice that parents make. It's an investment that parents make. And it's an investment in their child doing better in kindergarten, their child doing better in first grade and being ready to enter those spaces and being ready to enter those spaces successfully.

Interviewer
So there are critics that argue against spending because they believe the benefits of pre-K don't last. They fade by third grade. That's an argument.

Marc Wise
I think partially that's because -- this is going to get political, but... there are people that would like to see that money go elsewhere and that's just -- that's just a simple fact of allocation of resources. Do you spend it on this -- do you spend

money on a portion of the population that normally we'd never spent this money on before? And even though everything looks good on paper like the results are there, you will see this like what happens in pre-K take hold in society as all these studies have shown. That all that's there, but the fact that that money's never got to that before and in so few states, that money -- there's no precedent for it. And I think that's one of the reasons why there are a lot of detractors out there. Like that stuff can happen at home and that stuff -- but the kind of development that you get socially and emotionally at the age of four when you're confronted with 19 other people just like you in the room is vastly different than the kind of education you're going to receive at home from your mom or a baby-sitter or your father or even your brother and sister which is a totally different kind of learning and nonetheless valid. But it asks something totally different of the child. And investing in what we already know those results are, what they can be, and the potential that's there, seems like a pretty good idea. [Laugh] To me. It seems to make sense considering all of the problems that we have, not just here in Salt Lake, but anywhere. So. If you could have a number of people that were... at least aware that they're not the only people in the room all the time, I think that sometimes that could be one of those little things that helps make the world a little bit of a better place.

Interviewer

It also provides parents the opportunity to go to school during the day or go build their skills. Better employment, that kind of thing. It's a win/win.

Marc Wise

Yeah, and those, what the parents can get out of that and not only once they take a proactive approach to their child's education, I think that spins back on the parents. They're going to take a proactive approach toward whatever it is that their goals are in their life whether it be going back to school, or a better job or perhaps even more time to spend with the kids. All those become increasingly available once there's a little more balance. But I think the struggle is with growing populations and decreasing money supply [Laugh] how do you find a balance with this?

Interviewer

You're soon to be a father. Men's roles as teachers and fathers and mentors, it's huge. You look in these classrooms it's all women. It's great to see you here. Do you want to say anything to fathers? Ex-hockey player, six foot what?

Marc Wise

Six.

Interviewer

And here you are with these little teeny people, growing and developing.

Marc Wise

Yeah, and I think everybody has their own reasons for being comfortable in certain settings and I can't speak so much for fatherhood, like I'm working my way through that as you can see. And I don't know. All I know is that I don't know. I know I have -- there is a lot of learning that I've done of things that I don't want to do in terms of how I father my children, but I'm not really quite sure what that verb means. So to answer that explicitly and sort of on camera would be kind of hearsay.

Interviewer

You know how to raise this child well, at least for the first five years.

Marc Wise

Yes, definitely. Definitely. And I mean a lot of my friends have said, "Don't worry, you'll know what to do." Like once it's there, like once you're faced with the situation, as a human being, it's sort of already in your body. You kind of know what to do. I think sometimes the -- what happens on a day to day basis for a lot of parents is you're worrying about a lot of minutia and little moving parts and I think sometimes children get lost in the shuffle because of the millions of things that we think about as adults and have to be anxious about and have to take care of on a daily basis. So I think making sure that that circle always comes back to the child will be a goal of mine at least.

Interviewer

Do you find that when you're in the room with male parents, do they seek you out?

Marc Wise

Male parents? No. I think... in my experience, most male parents and male figures tend to not. They will immediately go talk to my para-professional or they will talk to another mother who will then come to me in a certain sense. That space has always been one that's difficult to manage because theoretically you should just shake hands, and they're parents like the other. But I think sometimes given not only like my size but sometimes the way I look, people are -- they don't want to approach me because of that which is pretty amusing because most of the time kids are fine. I think kids read that, oh, big guy's all right. Like this is cool. But it's been parents that sometimes they don't... it's whether it's just intimidation or sometimes it's simply a language barrier that I don't speak Spanish as well as I probably should. And sometimes I think that's one of the toughest parts to manage about being a male in this. And I was the only male working with 50-some females in this field for the last two years. So to have Matthew on board, it's nice to just have somebody else in the room to talk to in that sense, so.

Interviewer

So do you feel like you personally make a difference?

Marc Wise

Yes, I do feel like I make a difference. And albeit a small one. I think the fact that -- and it's a little easier to feel that way when you're in the classroom teaching. I think because you're on the ground and whether or not it's a new vocabulary word or solving a puzzle or... picking up a handful of grass and throwing it in the air -- you can see those things happening on a daily basis. You can see learning happening. And it's relatively quantifiable from day one to the end of the year. You can see drastic changes across like all of the students that you have. And that makes me feel like I'm making a difference. And just even if they're ready to kindergarten, I feel like I've done what my job is because they're ready for that next step. You know, they may not know how to write their first and last name by the time they leave pre-K but you've set up the conditions for that to happen in kindergarten which developmentally it should, you know? That you can have children that are more than ready for kindergarten. It's another way of seeing that you're doing something, which is pretty rewarding considering the time and the energy that it takes for all the teachers to work as hard as they do.

Interviewer

There's a group of people who will say what does this have to do with me? Why should I care about a child's development between zero and five in my state, in my region, in my community? How does this affect me? I've had my kids, whatever.

Marc Wise

I think early childhood education in any state affects people through -- the best way I want to look at it is through chain of command. Like essentially you're setting up the groundwork for what becomes of your society, of the place that you live for the future. And if it doesn't start from zero to five, or if it doesn't start at four when they go to preschool, when is it going to start? When do we learn to be good citizens of the community? Do you just learn later? Is it something like through osmosis that you just get because like you've already had kids and you've already done that work? Or is it something that takes each and every one? And I think it's something that takes an entire community. And if the community wants to be as integrated as, in an ideal setting it can be, and that we would all want it to be. And if a public institution is going to serve its purpose and its role, then that groundwork needs to be laid right from the start. And there's no simpler answer to that question than we start educating our children right from the start. And that's not to say that education is going to, you know, the institutionalization and sort of homogenization of education as well as all of the public infrastructure that's set up around it between districts and states and all of the inevitable red tape that happens that complicates the issue. I think the simplest answer is that these people are going to be taking care of what you have now. And if that doesn't make any sense then we should -- I don't know, it's a lot bigger project than even that, if that's not making sense to people. If

education from zero to five in Utah as like -- in a perfect world, let's say legislation passes and it just becomes free and something really wonderful happens like in Oklahoma. Oklahoma has free, through a really great story, Oklahoma has free pre-K education for all. And obviously you're not going to know what the results are five, ten years down, but maybe 20, 30 years you can start to see what all -- where all that money's going and what it's doing. And if that just means that there are less people in prisons, there are more people getting college degrees or even more people just graduating from high school, that like -- they all seem like pretty simple answers to me.

Interviewer

So the community should care because of the social cost.

Marc Wise

Yeah.

Interviewer

And so how do they express that support? What's the best way the community --

Marc Wise

The best way for the community to express the support for that is obviously there has to be legislation and there has to be the not so fun part of what happens when communities support, whether it's petitions, it's lobbying, it's phone calls and emails, all of that stuff. That has to take place. But I think before anything, it's just investing on a one to one basis with your child and investing not only time but maybe a little more resources than you might be comfortable giving up. And I think that's kind of been a topic actually, as I think about it, as in terms of what we're talking about is we have these resources and we're just trying to decide where to put them. And what's the best place to put them. And we're so used to putting our money towards... towards our defense or towards other social programs while, as I've said, like the really simple answer is -- let's help people be a better people. And that starts at a young age and that starts with support not only from parents, but from the community itself and the schools are the community. This is where everyone comes at the beginning of every day, at the end of every day. And yet somehow there's a disconnect between where all these people are, where the day starts and ends and where some of those resources go.